

A

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION

Saturday, September 23. 1710.

I have commented long upon the Doctrine of Resistance and Non-Resistance; I have shewn you the first Recogniz'd by the practise of this whole Nation in the Revolution, and the last disown'd by the Clergy of London, in their late Addresses to her Majesty; methinks we might need to have no more to say about it — There seems, however, some few Things to be Exam'd to clear the Case, before I dismiss it — And they respect some the Time past, and some the Time present — Those respecting the Time past, are the Clergy and most of our People taking the Oaths to King James, which, together with the Declaration they Subscrib'd, not

only ty'd them to his Heirs in the Literal Sense, but ty'd up their Hands from Resistance, were he never so much a Tyrant — And here some start a very ill-natur'd Question, viz. You talk of Resistance being a natural Law, and that Obedience to Princes is, as is their Power, Limited by Law — But suppose that were granted, yet if Subjects will voluntarily give up that Reserve, and Swear to an absolute Subjection — What ever Right others may have to Resist, they have none; for they have foreclos'd themselves, and given up the Right they had, if they had any.

Now this, say they, the Clergy and People of England did, when in their Oath of

of Allegiance, they swore to King James and his Heirs, and declar'd, That it was not Lawful for Subjects, on any pretence whatsoever, to Resist, &c.

This, I confess, sticks closer to some People, than I wish it did — And all I can say to it, is this — That they did take such Oaths, is true, nay, that some of them had too much a Hand in making these Oaths, and in Wording them so, as that the People must some time or other break them, or be undone, is also true.

And here by the by, I cannot but acknowledge, I think, that Multiplying Oaths has been always a Token of two Things; first, That the Sovereigns had something in View to impose upon their People, which they had Reason to believe, they would not easily comply with; secondly, That they had some Snare to draw the People into, by these Oaths, and both these were made true in the Case — And this made those two Reigns, 'heap Oath', Test, Sacraments, and all sorts of Chains and Fetter, upon the Consciences of the People; a Crime, not only Mischievous in its Nature, but in its Consequences, and which has render'd Oaths so familiar among us, that they lose their Solemnity, which is the great Efficient in an Oath, and growing into Contempt, are as easily broken as taken, and became no longer any Safety to the Imposer.

This is a Sin, both in Imposer and Taker, but chiefly in the first, and ought to be Reform'd; that Oaths of Fidelity may be restor'd to the Uses of their Institution, and Men's Consciences freed from taking that, which being simply Lawful in itself, becomes complexly unlawful by the Circumstances and Repetition.

Omne Juramentum debet esse in re Licitâ, Clara, & evidenti, Necessaria & Volili.

Now if these Gentlemen are hamper'd by the Oaths they took to King James, I am sorry for them; for my part, I thank God, that when he was King I never own'd him, never swore to him, never pray'd for him (as King) never paid any Act of Homage to him, never so much as Drank his Health, but look'd upon him as a Person who being Popish, had no Right to Rule; according to that famous Vote of the Convention, which I have often quoted, and which with Inexpressible Joy, I heard deliver'd at the Bar of the Lords House, in a Message from the Commons, by Mr. Hambden of Buckinghamshire, in 1688, viz.

That it is Inconsistent with the Constitution of this Protestant Kingdom, to be Govern'd by a Popish Prince.

Let those that lay all the Weight of the Revolution, upon the Abdication of King James, look upon this Vote; it is apparent by this, that tho' King James had not Abdicated, they would have depos'd and rejected him — But this is by the by.

I say as before, I never acknowledg'd him, therefore I never broke any Oaths in Relisting him — But to speak a Word to those that did — I own, I think there was a Sin — And perhaps some both in Government and People; but two Things I must take notice of in it.

1. The Sin of Government was, in imposing Oaths impossible, and unlawful to be kept.
2. The Sin of the People was, in taking Oaths Inconsistent with their Duty to God, and to their Country.

Both these Crimes, render'd the breaking these Oaths absolutely necessary, and therefore lawful; and here I must give you a little of my old Jingle upon this Subject, which I hope they that have already seen it, will bear with it, for the sake of those that have not.

He that an absolute Allegiance swears,
 Implicitly for Martyrdom prepares ;
 Ought, when the Monarch orders him to die,
 Submit to his Divine Authority ;
 With freedom execute his dark Command,
 And let out his own Life, with his Obedient Hand :
 What tho' he does the Laws of God Transgrefs ?
 He as sworn the Thing, and can perform no less ;
 He can no *non obstante* there pretend,
 Not God himself the Crime can countermand ;
 Heaven's quite foreclos'd, the Oath's a Pos'tive Deced,
 That does all other Sanction supersede.

But let us then *Distinguish Crimes, and see,*
Wherin Consists the Guilt of Perjury.

As they that Lawful Oaths shall fairly take,
 Are Perjur'd when those Lawful Oaths they break ;
 So they that swear Unlawful Things to do,
 Are Perjur'd, whether they're perform'd or no :
 The Crime in the Unlawful Swearing lay,
 For none may swear, what they must not obey ;
 'Tis he forswears that takes the wilful Yoke,
 He can't be farther Perjur'd when 'tis broke.

To take an Oath with which we can't comply,
 Must be premeditated Perjury ;
 And equal Guilt in both Sides must appear,
 In those that give the Oath, and those that Swear.
 He then that binds himself in such a Sense,
 As can not be perform'd without Offence ;
 The Perjury will in the Oath remain,
 He must his Duty, not his Oath Maintain ;
 'Twas a false Oath as it respected him,
 And must be broke, the taking it's a Crime :
 Heaven's Laws the Obligation will revoke,
 Because it can't be kept, it must be broke.

Then see from what foul Root this Poison grows,
 How Subjects learn'd to Swear, and Kings t' Impose.

The Jealousie of Tyrants was the Cause,
 Who dare not Trust their safety to the Laws :
 For 'twas convenient that they should prepare,
 By Laws unheard of Chains unheard to bear.

Tyrants

Tyrants by this confess when we obey,
 We're Honest, and Greater Fools than they ;
 Fools to suppose, when Royal Oaths are vain,
 The People's Obligation should remain ;
 That the void Contract should the Subjects bind,
 And leave the Monarch free, the Men Confin'd :
 And honest they must be to retain,
 Those Chains, that bind the Lawless Prince in vain.

This shews a little the Reason of making those unheard of Laws of the late Reigns ; if some Gentlemen who were then Deceived, fell into the Snare — They have, I hope, repented the *Sin of taking the Oaths* ; as for *breaking them*, that was, no doubt, their Duty — We see them now owning the Resistance they swore against, which to me signifies, They have seen the Unlawfulness of one, and the Necessity of the other.

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